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SUBJECT: MIXED PRESS REACTIONS TO LATEST SIX-PARTY AGREEMENT

¶1. SUMMARY: Official comments on the six-party accord and the accompanying abduction issue have been generally favorable, with Japan being satisfied that its views were reflected in the final document, namely, that delisting would be considerably difficult unless the nuclear and humanitarian issues are resolved. However, the print media has been lukewarm at best and sharply skeptical at worst, with some dailies seeing the fate of the abduction issue in the Six-Party Talks as a test of trust between Washington and Tokyo. END SUMMARY.

¶2. According to a Mainichi report (10/5), Prime Minister Fukuda believes that the USG's delisting of North Korea as a terrorist-supporting state is premised on a resolution of the abduction issue. In commenting on the six-party agreement, Fukuda is quoted as saying: "There is no mention of a date for the U.S. to delist North Korea. It says (the U.S.) will make a decision upon taking everything into consideration. The nuclear and humanitarian issues, for instance, must be considered. (Delisting) would be considerably difficult unless such issues are resolved."

¶3. Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura (Asahi, 10/4) hailed the six-party accord for requiring North Korea to declare all its nuclear programs by year's end, but a senior unnamed MOFA official, commenting on the document's portion on "beginning the process" of delisting, confided: "We have the impression that the delisting process has moved a half-step forward."

¶4. Most press reports on Japanese reactions to the latest six-party accord show a sense of caution or skepticism about the DPRK's nuclear commitments and deep concern about the fate of the abduction issue. A Mainichi article (10/4) reported that the GOJ has favorably accepted the agreement, with CCS Machimura quoted as saying, "An accord satisfactory to Japan was worked out in the final stage." But on the delisting issue, though no clear-cut date for delisting was mentioned, the Mainichi, echoing unnamed official sources, was worried: "Concern persists that if the second phase of the denuclearization process moved forward, the U.S. might delist the North, putting the abduction issue on the backburner." Editorials and commentaries in the major dailies, conservative and liberal alike, all had similar reservations about the U.S.' intention to consider seriously the abduction issue when deciding to delist the DPRK.

¶5. An editorial writer's article in the conservative Yomiuri (10/4), titled "Six-nation accord a bitter pill for Japan," noted that the absence of a deadline for removal of Pyongyang from its pariah list reflected Japanese insistence, but then continued: "Japan remained dissatisfied on many points, but only approved the document out of consideration for the U.S., South Korea, and the other participants in the talks." A

MOFA source was quoted as saying, "We fear the U.S. and North Korea might have made a tacit agreement that the pariah designation will be lifted by the end of the year." The commentary was sour on the nuclear deal as well, concluding, "The impression cannot be denied that Hill lowered the hurdles for North Korea's abandonment of nuclear weapons and put off awkward tasks because he was in too much of a hurry to get results."

16. In its October 4 editorial, Tokyo Shimbun warned that the DPRK might back away from the ultimate goal of denuclearization if the U.S. decided to delist North Korea as a sponsor of terrorism. "The delisting must be based on nuclear abandonment and the elimination of charges of supporting terrorism, such as by repatriating Japanese abductees." In a Beijing dispatch (10/1), a Nikkei correspondent, in reporting on the six-party agreement, was mildly optimistic about a perceived change in the DPRK's hostile stance toward Japan, predicting that persistent U.S. efforts may have paved the way for an actual improvement in Japan-DPRK ties. But this all could be lost, the reporter stated, if the U.S., in the rush for achievements, prematurely removed North Korea from the list of states sponsoring terrorism later this year. Such a move, he warned, "could create strains in Japan-U.S. relations."

DONOVAN